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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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CHINA: PROVINCIAL DEVELOPMENTS

Leadership Changes on the Horizon []

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SUMMARY

The largest turnover in provincial party leaders since Deng Xiaoping and his proteges reorganized the party committees in early 1983 will probably occur this year.* The 1985 turnover will be driven primarily by Beijing's push to retire cadres over age 65 from provincial party secretary positions. These changes should fine-tune the provincial committees to bring them closer to reformist objectives. As in the past, retirement guidelines will be applied flexibly; we expect that some provincial leaders with special qualifications will remain regardless of age. The national leadership may use the retirement guidelines to remove a small number of holdovers who have ties with Deng Xiaoping's former opponents and who are past retirement age. A few model provincial leaders may be promoted to central positions to replace aging national leaders. We expect that Beijing will use supervised elections to select new provincial leaders in politically troubled areas, and will continue to phase out the "First Secretary" title to foster the appearance of collective leadership. []

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*In this paper the term 'province' refers to China's 21 mainland provinces, 5 autonomous regions and 3 special municipalities. []

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This memorandum was prepared by [] China Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Comments and questions are welcome and should be addressed to Chief, Domestic Policy Branch, China Division, OEA at []

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Deng Xiaoping and his proteges in the national leadership completed a major shakeup of the provincial party apparatus in early 1983, reorganizing and streamlining provincial-level party committees. As a result, the size of the committees was roughly halved, the average age of local party leaders was reduced by five to eight years, and the number of college-educated cadres on the committees was increased. Since the reorganization, Beijing has received at least pro-forma support for Deng's reform programs from virtually every provincial leader. [REDACTED]

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While pursuing these goals, the national leadership took a flexible approach toward reorganization. For example, Beijing retained a number of provincial party leaders over the age of 65 who were judged to be the best choices to maintain political stability and institute reforms. In several cases, the national leadership permitted provincial leaders with ties to Deng's former opponent Hua Guofeng to remain at their posts, although the party committees under them were selected to ensure a pro-reform outlook. [REDACTED]

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The Changing of the Guard

We believe the largest turnover in provincial party leaders since the 1983 shakeup will occur this year, driven primarily by the push to retire elderly cadres. The revitalization of party leadership groups is one of Beijing's principal reform objectives, and one-third of the ranking provincial party leaders are over the recommended retirement age of 65. [REDACTED]

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We expect that Beijing will continue to apply retirement guidelines flexibly: in some cases overaged leaders will be retained because of their dynamic pursuit of reform goals, their close connections to Deng, or their experience in managing specific provinces. [REDACTED]

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We believe the leading candidates for retirement this year include:

- Guangdong's First Secretary Ren Zhongyi, 69, a staunch reformer, who has been reported to be in poor health. [REDACTED]
- Hebei's First Secretary Gao Yang, about 70, who was transferred to the province in August 1982 to improve agricultural performance and to bring the province in line with central policies - tasks which are now substantially completed. Gao has been a member of the Central Advisory Commission since 1982. [REDACTED]
- Liaoning's First Secretary Guo Feng, mid-70s, China's oldest provincial leader. Guo also holds a position on the Central Advisory Commission. [REDACTED]
- Su Yiran, 71, who has shared Shandong's party leadership with Liang Buting since March 1983. Now that Liang has established himself in Shandong - he was transferred to Shandong from the less populated Qinghai Province - we believe Su will retire. [REDACTED]

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The Holdovers

A few leaders with ties to Deng Xiaoping's former opponents remain in provincial leadership posts. They have been careful to pay lip service to the reformist leadership, but their commitment to reform programs is questionable. If Beijing succeeds in replacing them, it will both augment the strength of the reformists and give a warning to lower-level cadre who are dragging their feet on reforms. With one exception these men are past the officially recommended retirement age for provincial party secretaries.

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- An Pingsheng, about 70, was appointed Yunnan's First Secretary in February 1977 by then-Party Chairman Hua Guofeng. The frequent subject of retirement rumors.

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_____ An previously served as First Secretary in Guangxi under the patronage of Guangxi's Cultural Revolution strongman Wei Guoqing. Wei still holds his Politburo rank, but his perceived estrangement from Deng and his Cultural Revolution background are liabilities to those connected with him. Recent national press coverage of continuing factionalism among Yunnan's 'senior leading cadres' in our view reflects Beijing's dissatisfaction with An.

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- Qiao Xiaoguang, 71, replaced An Pingsheng in February 1977 as Guangxi's First Secretary. Qiao's problems are legion: like An he is a protege of Wei Guoqing, he has failed to control virulent factionalism in the province or promote economic growth, and his implementation of the rectification program has been sluggish.

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_____ In our judgment, much of the administration of Guangxi has already passed to reform-minded deputy secretaries, led by Wei Chunshu.

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- Mao Zhiyong, 54, has demonstrated remarkable staying power as Hunan's First Secretary since being appointed in June 1977 by his mentor, Hua Guofeng. Hunan was Hua's provincial base and leftist influence there is still strong. The national press has frequently publicized cases of Hunan cadres obstructing economic and political reforms. Since Hua's downfall there have been persistent rumors that Mao would be replaced,

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_____ We cannot fully account for Mao's political longevity, but factors in his favor include his youth (which denies Beijing the excuse of retiring him because of age), his evidently strong provincial support, and his regular public self-criticisms for Hunan's failure to toe the reformist line. A mid-January People's Daily commentary that

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criticized Hunan's rectification efforts may have been part of a new effort to shake Mao from his post, but he seems to have again escaped the axe with a public pledge to maintain unity with the central leadership delivered in late January. [REDACTED]

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- Chi Biqing, 66, another protege of Hua Guofeng, was appointed First Secretary in Guizhou in July 1980. Information on Chi's political health is scarce; his appointment during the transitional period when Hua's star was fading may mark him as a compromise candidate who has been acceptable to the reformists. He has generally supported economic reforms, but a recent Chinese economic journal article which termed Guizhou's backwardness "shocking" may signal difficulty for Chi. [REDACTED]

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Some Other Troublespots

Additional leadership changes may take place in Shanghai and in Fujian province to limit infighting within leadership groups in those areas. [REDACTED]

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- Chen Guodong, 62, First Secretary of Shanghai municipality, is reported to be at loggerheads with Shanghai Mayor Wang Daohan, 69, over the direction of economic reforms in Shanghai. Shanghai's economic performance has disappointed Deng and his proteges in the national leadership, who have wanted the city's massive bureaucratic apparatus to move more quickly on economic reforms. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] a development strategy for the city which includes trimming the role of the party bureaucracy has been worked out. We believe a shake-up in Shanghai's leadership is likely - there are persistent rumors that Chen will step down soon, and that Wang will retire later this year or early in 1986 once the development program is implemented. [REDACTED]

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- Ma Xingyuan, 67, Fujian Party Secretary and acknowledged leader of the 'Shanxi' faction, is one of the individuals resisting First Secretary Xiang Nan's efforts to reduce factionalism in Fujian. Some of Fujian's factions date from the late 1940s when the province was liberated by army units out of Shanxi province - units whose personnel stayed on to take up administrative posts in Fujian. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] It is not clear, however, whether Ma, who has held his current position since 1975, can be dislodged. [REDACTED]

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On The Way Up

Deng's push to retire elderly cadre may create some vacancies at the national level, and a number of provincial party leaders are possible candidates for promotion to these slots. The upwardly mobile provincial

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leaders include Fujian First Secretary Xiang Nan, 66, a Communist Youth League associate of Hu Yaobang, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Shandong Party Secretary Liang Buting, about 64, is also tied to Hu Yaobang through the Communist Youth League; we believe his prospects for eventual transfer to a central position are good. [REDACTED]

Additional model, and possibly upwardly-mobile, provincial leaders include Shanxi Secretary Li Ligong, 59; Sichuan Secretary Yang Rudai, 57; Beijing Secretary and Mayor Chen Xitong, 54; and Tianjin Mayor and Secretary Li Ruihuan, 50. Yang is a protege of Zhao Ziyang, Chen and Li Ligong both have Communist Youth League connections with Hu Yaobang, and Li Ruihuan is reported to be a protege of Vice Premier Wan Li. [REDACTED]

Retirement Prospects Uncertain

A number of provincial leaders who are past retirement age may continue to occupy their positions because of their unique qualifications or strong political connections to the national leadership. [REDACTED]

- Wang Enmao, 72, Xinjiang's First Secretary, brought order to the province following serious clashes between Han Chinese and Xinjiang's ethnic minorities in 1981. Although he is past retirement age, Beijing probably will retain Wang as party head because of his extensive experience in the province and his proven ability to maintain stability in this sensitive border region. [REDACTED]
- Zhou Hui, about 70, was recently reconfirmed Nei Mongol's party chief by the provincial party congress, and is not likely to be retired in the near future. We believe that, like Wang Enmao, Zhou has retained his position despite his age because of his experience in handling affairs in an ethnically mixed border region. He has also expressed strong support for the reform program. [REDACTED]
- Liu Jie, 67, Henan Party Secretary, was reconfirmed as head of the province's party committee last August despite his being a likely candidate for retirement - he has been on the Central Advisory Commission for over two years. We believe factors which weighed in his favor include his technical educational background, and his demonstrated skill at maintaining political stability in Henan. [REDACTED]
- Bai Dongcai, about 67, may retain his position as First Party Secretary in Jiangxi due to his long connections in the province, and despite a lackluster performance in carrying out reforms. Bai's personal connection with Deng Xiaoping is probably also a factor in his political longevity. In an article published last August, Deng Xiaoping's daughter disclosed that Bai had visited Deng while he was in political exile in Jiangxi during the Cultural Revolution and arranged to have Deng's living conditions improved. [REDACTED]

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Elections to Select Provincial Party Leaders

Articles in the People's Daily last November touted the use of elections in Shaanxi province, which has a troubled history, to select provincial party secretaries, and urged that elections be "properly introduced to other localities." The "elections" in Shaanxi were limited to 300 cadre at or above the county level. We believe they were supervised by representatives of the national leadership, but the process did allow some measure of choice and permitted frank discussion of the candidates. []

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Despite the favorable national coverage of the Shaanxi model, we believe elections will be used only in special cases. Recent provincial party congresses in Nei Monggol, Anhui and Jiangsu, for instance, have failed to use the election method. We believe Beijing will use elections primarily in badly factionalized provinces, where there is no consensus on who should be party boss. Beijing may hope that supervised elections will allow cadre to air factional grievances and create at least acceptance if not support for the new party leader. []

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Elimination of First Secretary Position

We expect Beijing to continue gradually eliminating the "First Secretary" title. The change is intended to foster the appearance of rule by consensus rather than by a strongman. The change may also be intended to reflect the provincial party committees' reduced role as economic and administrative decision-making authority is transferred to lower-level bodies. []

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Despite the dropping of the "First Secretary" position, the reality of a leading figure on the committee remains. Provinces where the First Secretary position has been eliminated use the terms "Secretary" for the party head and "Deputy Secretary" for the other secretaries. Thus far 16 provincial-level committees have dropped the "First Secretary" position, either by retiring the position when the individual is replaced, or by eliminating the title after approval by the provincial-level party congress. []

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